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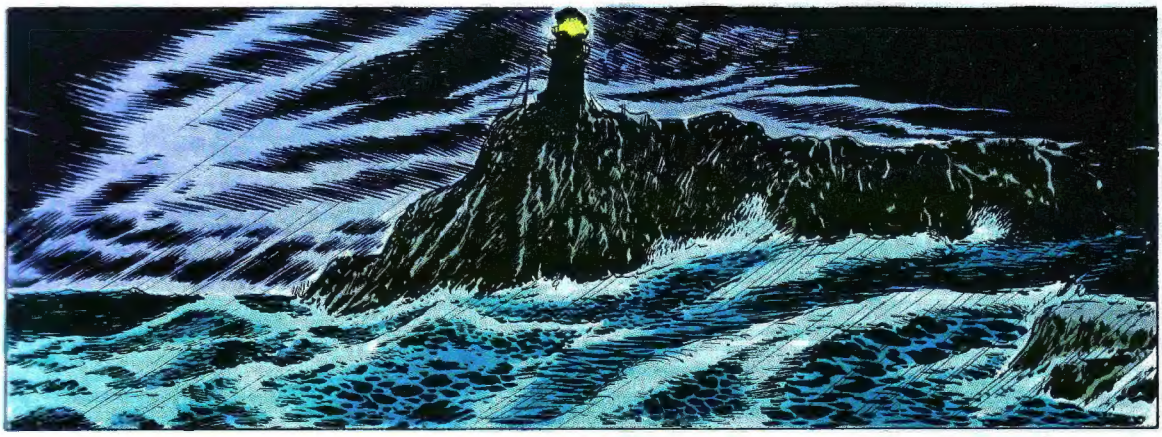
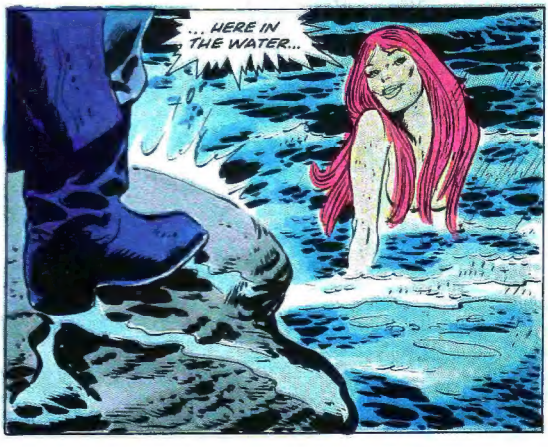


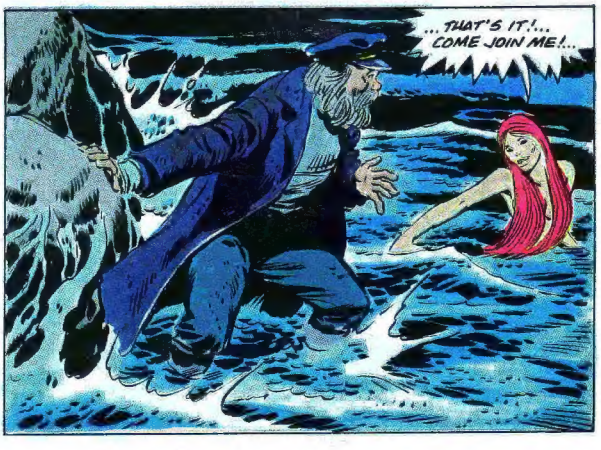
MR. HERSHWOOD..
...MR. HERSHWOOD..
...COME...

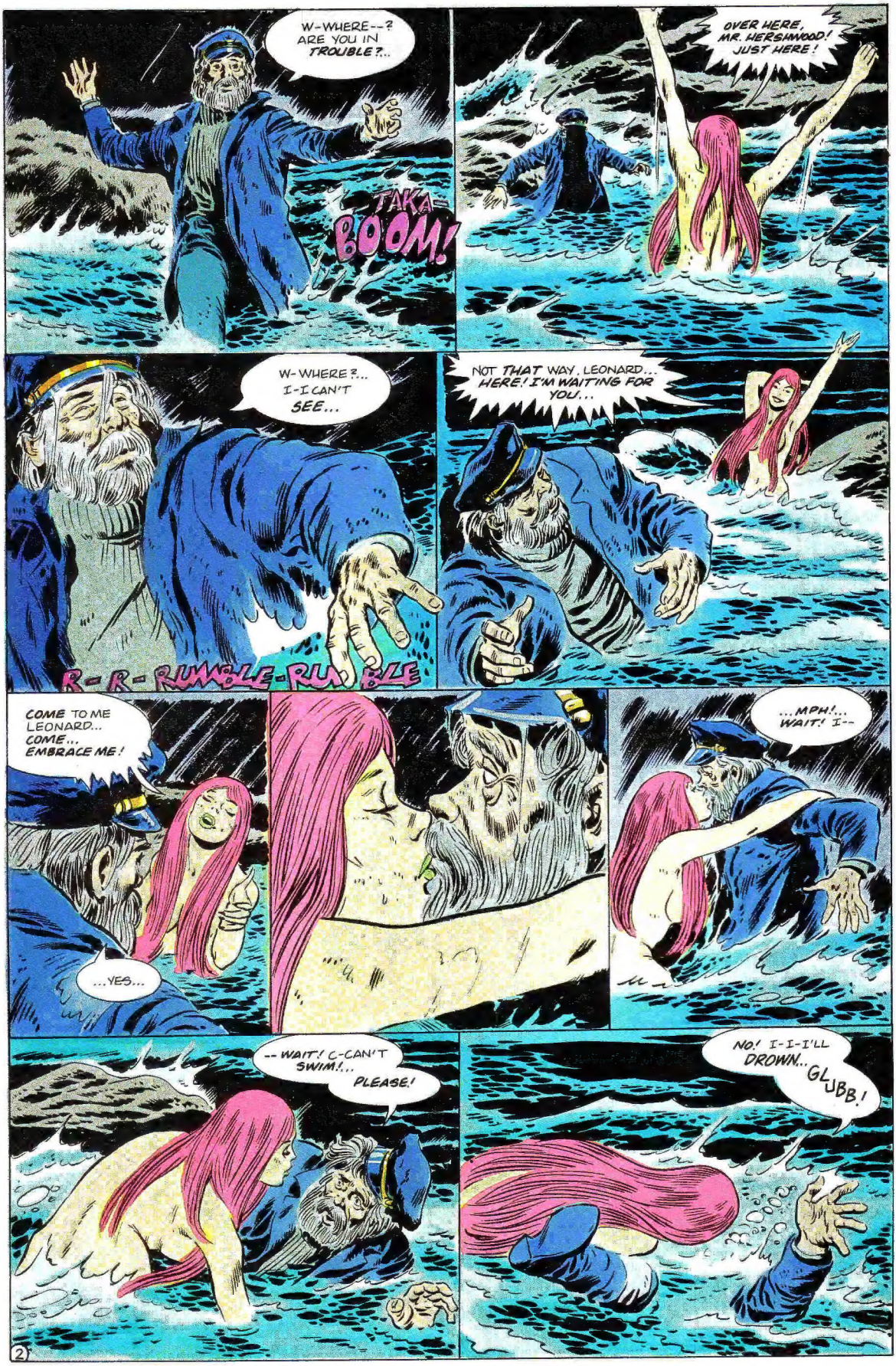
...COME, COME TO ME, MR. HERSHWOOD...

... YES!... THIS WAY... COME CLOSER...

... I'M HERE, MR. HERSHWOOD.. HERE...


... HERE IN THE WATER...

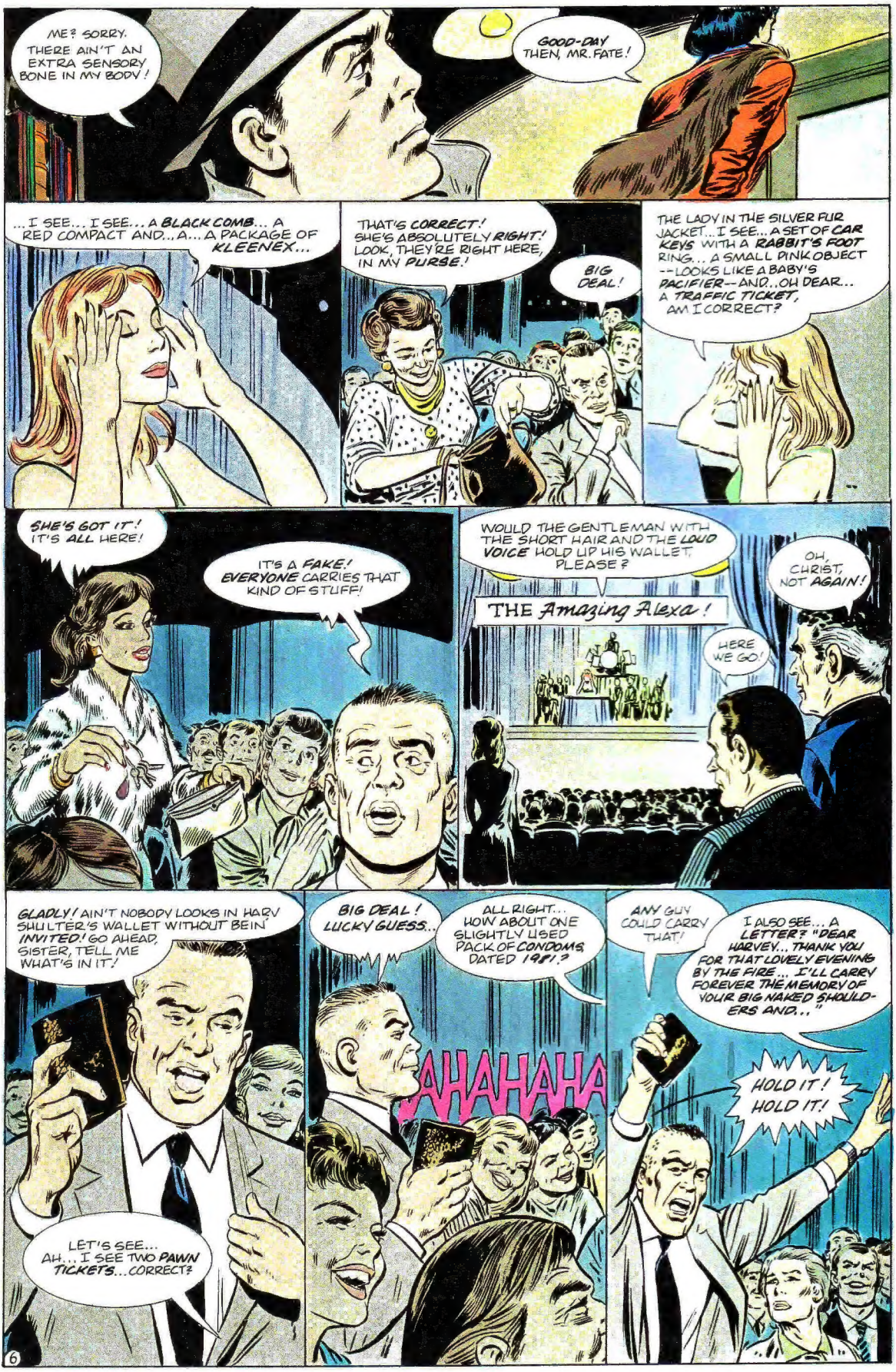

... THAT'S IT!... COME JOIN ME!..


W-WHERE--? ARE YOU IN TROUBLE?..
TAKa-BOOM!
OVER HERE, MR. HERSHWOOD! JUST HERE!
W-WHERE?... I-I CAN'T SEE...
R-R-RUMBLE-RUMBLE
NOT THAT WAY, LEONARD... HERE! I'M WAITING FOR YOU...
COME TO ME LEONARD... COME... EMBRACE ME!
...YES...
...MPH!... WAIT! I--
-- WAIT! C-CAN'T SWIM!... PLEASE!
NO! I-I-I'LL DROWN.. GLUBB!

Story: Bruce Jones Art: Gerald Forton Letters: Diane Valentino Colours: Ripley Thornhill

HOLY SHI--!!
CRAASSH
W-WHAT THE BLAZES!! -- WHO ARE YOU?
YOU ARE ARTEMUS FATE, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR?
HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE? THE DOOR WAS LOCKED!
NOT WHEN I CAME THROUGH IT. IS YOUR ADVERTISING ACCURATE, MR. FATE?
ADVERTISING?
ARE YOU TRULY PSYCHIC, AS YOUR OFFICE DOOR CLAIMS?
WELL NOW, MAYBE I IS AND MAYBE I AIN'T. FIRST OFF, WHO WANTS TO KNOW?
MY NAME IS MELANIE HERSHWOOD.. THIS IS A PHOTO OF MY FATHER, LEONARD.
Lighthouse Keeper Drowned
Leonard Hershwood, keeper of the Point Loma lighthouse, a local icon for decades, was found dead Sunday morning from an apparent accidental drowning. Why Hershwood had wandered from his nightly post in the glass-enclosed tower is unclear, but authorities rule out foul play...

MY CONDOLENCES, MISS HERSHWOOD... CIGARETTE?
NO, THANK YOU.
SKRAAAWK!
TAKE A HIKE, SATAN!
SORRY, MISS HERSHWOOD. MY RAVEN'S GOT A THING FOR LADIES' PERFUME. IT'S LIKE CATNIP TO A TABBY.
I'M NOT WEARING PERFUME, MR. FATE.
YEAH... I NOTICED. YOU'RE ALSO NOT EASILY STARTLED... A BIRD THAT SIZE WOULD SPOOK A STEVEDORE. YOU'RE A COOL CUSTOMER, MISS HERSHWOOD. WHY DOES SOMEONE SO COLLECTED NEED AN EXPENSIVE P.I.?
I DON'T. I NEED AN INEXPENSIVE PSYCHIC. IS YOUR ADVERTISING ACCURATE OR NOT?
LET'S SAY IT IS ... FOR NOW. HOW CAN I HELP YOU?
MY FATHER DIDN'T DROWN "ACCIDENTLY." MR. FATE. HE WAS TOO CAUTIOUS A MAN. NOR WOULD HE GO GROPING ABOUT A STORM-LASHED SHORELINE WITHOUT GOOD REASON. I THINK HE WAS MURDERED.
DO YOU, NOW? THE L.A. TIMES AND POINT LOMA POLICE APPEAR TO DISAGREE. DID HE HAVE ENEMIES, YOUR FATHER?
EVERY MAN HAS ENEMIES, MR. FATE.
THAT'S CRYPTIC.
SKRAWK!
PLEASE DON'T WASTE MY TIME, MR. FATE. DO YOU POSSESS PSYCHIC ABILITIES OR NOT?

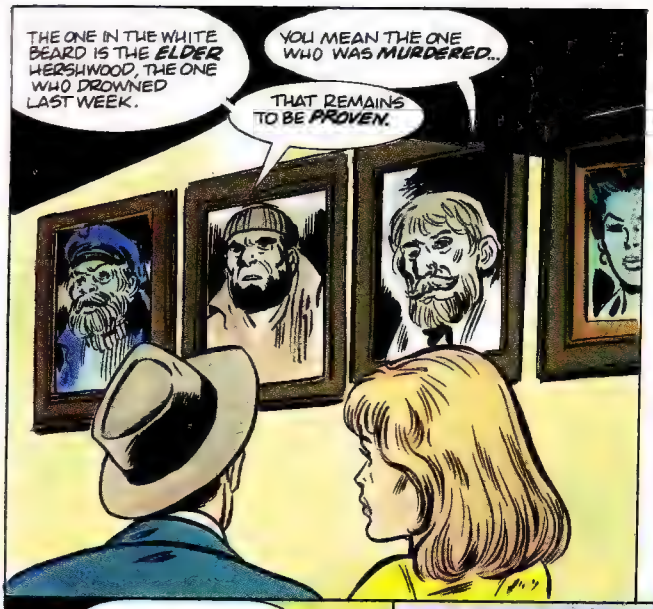

ME? SORRY. THERE AIN'T AN EXTRA SENSORY BONE IN MY BODY!
GOOD-DAY THEN, MR. FATE!
...I SEE... I SEE... A BLACK COMB... A RED COMPACT AND... A... A PACKAGE OF KLEENEX...
THAT'S CORRECT! SHE'S ABSOLUTELY RIGHT! LOOK, THEY'RE RIGHT HERE, IN MY PURSE!
BIG DEAL!
THE LADY IN THE SILVER FUR JACKET... I SEE... A SET OF CAR KEYS WITH A RABBIT'S FOOT RING... A SMALL PINK OBJECT --LOOKS LIKE A BABY'S PACIFIER-- AND... OH DEAR... A TRAFFIC TICKET, AM I CORRECT?
SHE'S GOT IT! IT'S ALL HERE!
IT'S A FAKE! EVERYONE CARRIES THAT KIND OF STUFF!
WOULD THE GENTLEMAN WITH THE SHORT HAIR AND THE LOUD VOICE HOLD UP HIS WALLET, PLEASE?
THE Amazing Alexa!
OH, CHRIST, NOT AGAIN!
HERE WE GO!
GLADLY! AIN'T NOBODY LOOKS IN HARV SHULTER'S WALLET WITHOUT BEIN' INVITED! GO AHEAD, SISTER, TELL ME WHAT'S IN IT!
LET'S SEE... AH... I SEE TWO PAWN TICKETS... CORRECT?
BIG DEAL! LUCKY GUESS...
ALL RIGHT... HOW ABOUT ONE SLIGHTLY USED PACK OF CONDOMS, DATED 1981?
AHAHAHA
ANY GUY COULD CARRY THAT!
I ALSO SEE... A LETTER? "DEAR HARVEY... THANK YOU FOR THAT LOVELY EVENING BY THE FIRE... I'LL CARRY FOREVER THE MEMORY OF YOUR BIG NAKED SHOULDERS AND..."
HOLD IT! HOLD IT!

"--LOVE AND KISSES, GWENDOLYNE.'"
GWENDOLYNE!! WHY, YOU TWO-TIMING--
MADGE, WAIT! IT AIN'T WHAT YOU THINK!
HEY, THAT'S MY GIRLFRIEND, PAL!
HIT MY HUSBAND, WILL YOU!
HEY, WATCH WHO YER SHOVIN'!
HELLO, SATAN. HOW'S TRICKS?
WHERE ARE YOU GOIN', ALEXA? YOU STILL GOT TWO SHOWS TO DO!
GOTTA RUN, SID.. CIAO.!!
DAMNIT, ALEXA! GET BACK HERE AND CALM DOWN THIS AUDIENCE! YOU HEAR ME?! YOU'RE FIRED ALEXA! FIRED!
COOL DOWN, BOSS. SHE MAY BE ERRATIC, BUT SHE'S THE BEST DRAW ON THE STRIP.
EVERY TIME THAT DAMN CROW SHOWS UP, SHE'S GONE LIKE A SHOT!
YEAH... WONDER WHERE THEY FLY OFF TO TOGETHER?

I STILL DON'T GET IT, ARTIE: IF YOU PLAN TO HELP THIS DARK AND MYSTERIOUS LADY, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL HER I WAS PRECOGNITIVE?
PRIVATE PROPERTY
BECAUSE SOMETIMES, MISS SMITH, I'M A LITTLE PSYCHIC MYSELF, AND THIS THING SMELLS- YOU'LL PARDON THE PUN- FISHY. LET'S DO SOME PRIVATE SNOOPING ON OUR OWN FIRST, HUH?
LOCKED. WELL, I EXPECTED THAT.
HOW ABOUT IT, KID, ANY VIBRATIONS?
OH ARTIE, I DON'T LIKE IT HERE... IT'S SEVENTY DEGREES OUT AND I'M FREEZING! THERE'S SOMETHING TERRIBLE EMANATING FROM THIS PLACE— I-I'M AFRAID TO OPEN UP COMPLETELY!
TRY TO PIN IT DOWN, ALEX, WE NEED A LEAD...
IT--IT'S IN THE... ROCKS! HUNGER... TERRIBLE HUNGER! OH, ARTIE, IT'S AWFUL!
THE SIGN SAYS "PRIVATE PROPERTY." CAN'T YOU READ?
AND WHO MIGHT YOU BE, FRIEND?
I BE THE OWNER TO YONDER LIGHTHOUSE, "FRIEND" AND THE PROPERTY SURROUNDING IT! NOW, GIT! THE TWO OF YE!
HEY, THAT HURTS!

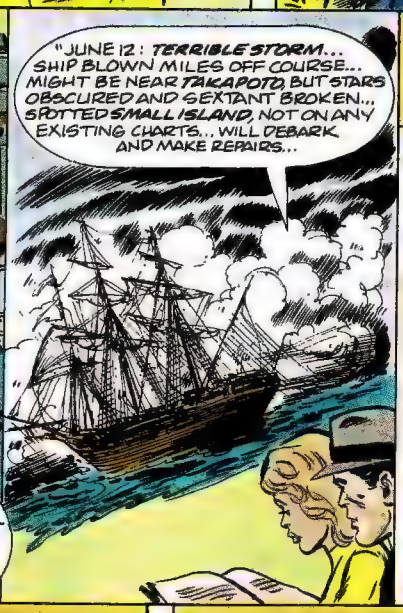
THAT'S NO WAY TO HANDLE A LADY, "FRIEND!"
CRACK!
CRACK!
...OH, SHIT.
WHOAAA
"LEVERAGE," ARTIE, "LEVERAGE!"
CRUUUNCH!
YA BIG MOOSE!
"LEVERAGE," ARTIE!
YAAAGH!

SIGH SOMETIMES I THINK YOU'LL NEVER GET THE HANG OF IT!
HI! I'M ALEXA SMITH -- NO RELATION TO THE ACTRESS!
KACHA!
THIS IS ARTIE'S RAVEN, SATAN!
WHUUF...
PLEASED TO MEETCHA!
THERIN HERSHWOOD, 1717 SYCAMORE DRIVE. DIDN'T YOU SAY THE WOMAN WHO VISITED THE OFFICE WAS NAMED HERSHWOOD?
IF THIS IS A RELATIVE, IT MUST BE A BROTHER OR COUSIN.
HERE'S HIS KEY-- SHALL WE HAVE A LOOK AT "YONDER" LIGHTHOUSE, BEFORE HE WAKES UP?
COZY.
THIS MUST BE THE HERSHWOOD ROGUE'S GALLERY-- HANDSOME FAMILY...

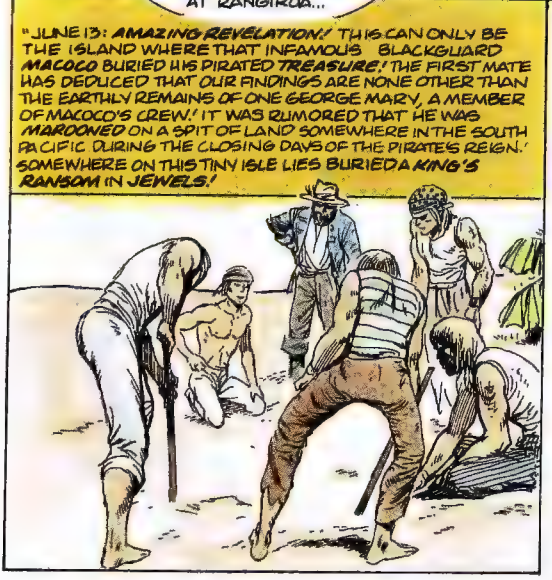

THE ONE IN THE WHITE BEARD IS THE ELDER HERSHWOOD, THE ONE WHO DROWNED LAST WEEK.
YOU MEAN THE ONE WHO WAS MURDERED...
THAT REMAINS TO BE PROVEN.

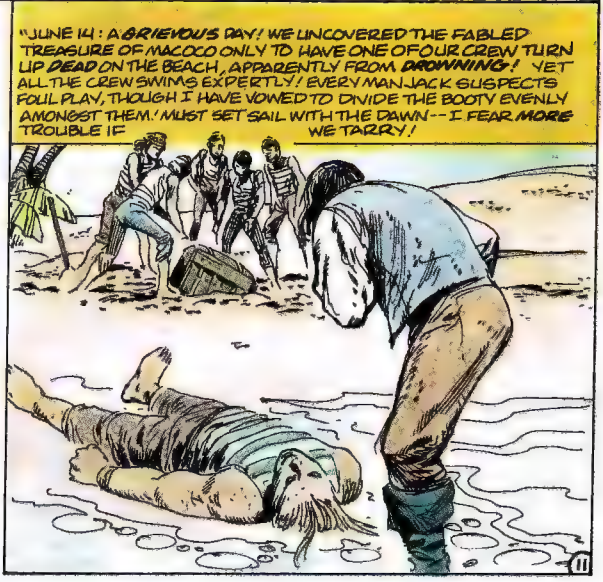
ARTIE, LOOK! A SHIP'S LOG--A GENUINE SHIP'S LOG, DATED 1862! OH, ISN'T THIS NEAT!
TRY TO SOUND A LITTLE MORE OFFICIOUS, HUH, ALEX? I MEAN, WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE PROS, HERE.

HEY, THIS IS NEAT!
"LOG OF THE YANKEE PASHA... PETER HERSHWOOD, CAPTAIN.
"JUNE 10, 1862: SAILED NORTH-WEST OF THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS TOWARD THE TUAMOTU ARCHIPELAGO, FRENCH POLYNESIA, BOUND FOR BORA BORA. LOST SOME TIME IN THE DOLDRUMS. TOOK ON FOOD AND WATER AT RANGIROA...


"JUNE 12: TERRIBLE STORM... SHIP BLOWN MILES OFF COURSE... MIGHT BE NEAR TAKAPOTO, BUT STARS OBSCURED AND SEXTANT BROKEN... SPOTTED SMALL ISLAND, NOT ON ANY EXISTING CHARTS... WILL DEBARK AND MAKE REPAIRS...

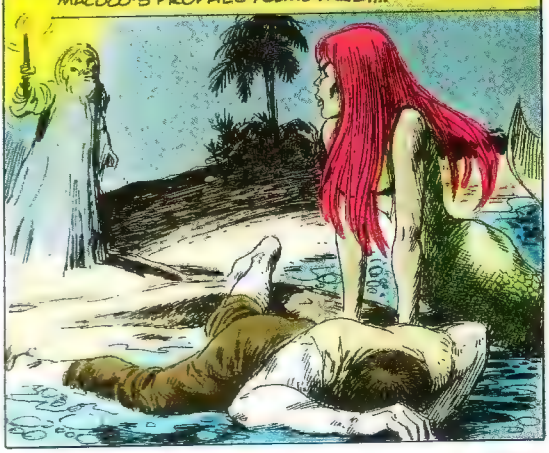
"... ISLAND SMALL BUT BOUNTIFUL. CREW LOADING THE HOLD WITH FRESH FRUIT. DISCOVERED THE REMNANTS OF WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN A PREVIOUS VISIT BY ENGLISH SAILORS: BELT, CUTLASS, SOME BONES...


"JUNE 13: AMAZING REVELATION! THIS CAN ONLY BE THE ISLAND WHERE THAT INFAMOUS BLACKGUARD MACOCO BURIED HIS PIRATED TREASURE! THE FIRST MATE HAS DEDUCED THAT OUR FINDINGS ARE NONE OTHER THAN THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF ONE GEORGE MARY, A MEMBER OF MACOCO'S CREW! IT WAS RUMORED THAT HE WAS MAROONED ON A SPIT OF LAND SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC DURING THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE PIRATE'S REIGN! SOMEWHERE ON THIS TINY ISLE LIES BURIED A KING'S RANSOM IN JEWELS!

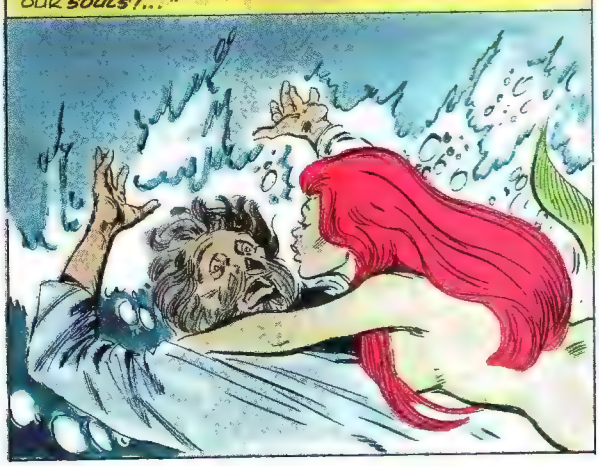

"JUNE 14: A GRIEVOUS DAY! WE UNCOVERED THE FABLED TREASURE OF MACOCO ONLY TO HAVE ONE OF OUR CREW TURN UP DEAD ON THE BEACH, APPARENTLY FROM DROWNING! YET ALL THE CREW SWIMS EXPERTLY! EVERY MAN JACK SUSPECTS FOUL PLAY, THOUGH I HAVE VOWED TO DIVIDE THE BOOTY EVENLY AMONGST THEM! MUST SET SAIL WITH THE DAWN--I FEAR MORE TROUBLE IF WE TARRY!

"...TERRIBLE NIGHT! THREE MORE CREWMEN DEAD! SOME OF THE SAILORS CLAIM THEY HEARD VOICES...WOMEN'S VOICES! WOMEN, ON THIS DESERTED PLACE? TRIED TO CAST OFF--GET AWAY--BUT SOMETHING FOULED IN THE RUDDER. NEED LIGHT TO MAKE REPAIRS... NIGHTMARISH DREAMS... FISH CREATURES ATTACKING SHIP... WOKE TO TERRIBLE PREMONITIONS--WE ARE BEING KEPT HERE AGAINST OUR WILL!... EXHAUSTED...NEED PROPER REST...

"...I CAN SCARCELY WRITE, YET MUST RECORD THIS... WOKE AGAIN TO FIND HALF OF CREW MISSING! RAN ONTO BEACH CRYING THEIR NAMES! HEARD MY NAME BEING CALLED BUT NOT BY CREW--BY A WOMAN'S VOICE! STUMBLED DOWN THE BEACH TO HORRIBLE SIGHT! MOST OF THE CREW DEAD IN THE SHALLOWS--SOME STILL BEING SLAUGHTERED, BEING PULLED BENEATH THE WAVES BY BEAUTIFUL, EVIL-LOOKING FISH-WOMEN! MERMAIDS! MACOCO'S PROPHECY COME TRUE...!



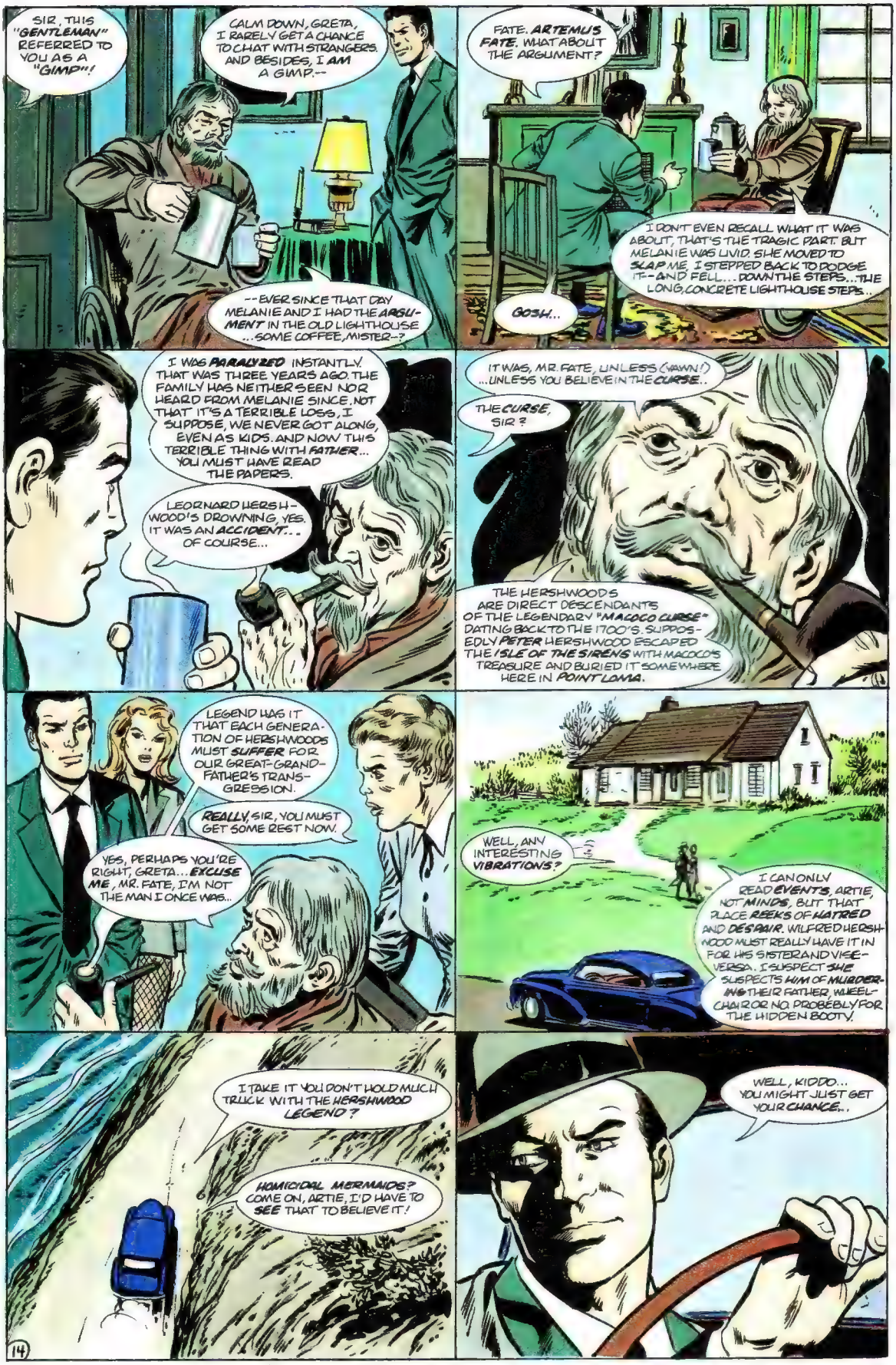
"...THEY CALLED MY NAME!... POWERLESS TO RESIST!--LIKE SIRENS OF OLD! MUST GO TO THEM! SOMEONE DRAGGED ME BACK--THE FIRST MATE! WE MADE IT BACK TO THE SHIP WITH A HANDFUL OF OTHERS. GOT UNDERWAY WITH RUDDER STILL FROZEN... SAILED INTO THE NIGHT, AWAY FROM THAT ISLE OF HORROR!... PRAY WE REACH SOME FRIENDLY SHORE, REGAIN OUR WITS... OUR SOULS!..."



THAT'S THE LAST ENTRY. WOW... WHAT A TALE! I WONDER WHAT HE MEANT BY "MACOCO'S PROPHECY"?
THE PIRATE MACOCO WAS HANGED IN 1785 IN ENGLAND; SUPPOSEDLY, AS THE EXECUTIONER WAS TIGHTENING THE NOOSE, HE--MACOCO--LAID A CURSE ON ALL THOSE WHO SOUGHT HIS TREASURE...
DIDN'T YOU EVER READ ANYTHING BUT NANCY DREW AS A KID?

SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
TO THE POINT LOMA PHONE DIRECTORY... LEONARD HERSHWOOD IS DEAD, WE'VE ALREADY MET THERIN HERSHWOOD OUTSIDE--LET'S GO SEE IF WILFRED HERSHWOOD IS STILL ALIVE...

YES --?
GOOD AFTERNOON, MADAM, I REPRESENT THE "LITTLE MIRACLE" VACUUM CLEANER COMPANY, WALLA WALLA, WASHINGTON!
WE'D LIKE JUST A MERE FRACTION OF YOUR PRECIOUS TIME TO DEMONSTRATE OUR AMAZING PRODUCT! UH- IS THE MAN OF THE HOUSE IN?
MR. HERSHWOOD IS INFIRM AND DOESN'T WISH TO BE DISTUR--
NO PROBLEM, MADAM, SOME OF THE MOST VALUED CUSTOMERS OF THE "LITTLE MIRACLE" VACUUM CLEANER COMPANY ARE GIMPS!
MY, MY, WHAT AN ATTRACTIVE HOME!
BUT EVEN IN THE BEST KEPT HOMES THERE EXISTS AN OFTEN INVISIBLE LAYER OF DIRT AND DUST THAT PROVIDE A VERITABLE BREEDING GROUND FOR GERMS... RESULTING IN WHAT WE IN THE BUSINESS REFER TO AS "HOUSE-A-TOSIS"! TISK-TISK!
GERMS CAUSE "BAD BREATH"?
MADAM, GERMS HAVE BAD BREATH! NOW, IF YOU'LL KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE LITTLE LADY...
STOP! NO! COUGH-COUGH! GOOD LORD!.. COUGH!
ONLY A LITTLE COMMON COAL DUST, MADAM! NOW WATCH HOW QUICKLY THE "LITTLE MIRACLE" VACUUM CLEANER MAKES SHORT WORK OF THIS UNSIGHTLY HOUSEHOLD NUISANCE!
STOP! COUGH! YOU'RE MAKING IT COUGH! WORSE!
WHO IS IT, GRETA?
I'M SORRY, MR. WILFRED, THIS MANIAC COUGH! BARGED IN AND --
AH, THE MAN OF THE HOUSE! SIR, DO YOU REALIZE THE AMOUNT OF DIRT AND GRIME EVEN THE CLEANEST OF HOMES CAN ACCUMULATE?
TAKE THE GLASS ON THIS PHOTO, FOR INSTANCE-- AND MIGHT I ADD, WHAT A LOVELY PHOTO IT IS, SIR. YOUR DAUGHTER, PERHAPS?
WILL YOU GET OUT!!
MY SISTER, ACTUALLY. YES, A LOVELY GIRL... BUT HARDLY A GOOD SISTER. WE HAD A FALLING OUT SOME YEARS BACK, NEVER SEE HER ANY MORE
I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU MEAN, SIR, HAD A BROTHER LIKE THAT MYSELF. TELL ME ABOUT HER...


SIR, THIS "GENTLEMAN" REFERRED TO YOU AS A "GIMP"!
CALM DOWN, GRETA, I RARELY GET A CHANCE TO CHAT WITH STRANGERS. AND BESIDES, I AM A GIMP.--
--EVER SINCE THAT DAY MELANIE AND I HAD THE ARGUMENT IN THE OLD LIGHTHOUSE ...SOME COFFEE, MISTER--?
FATE. ARTEMUS FATE. WHAT ABOUT THE ARGUMENT?
I DON'T EVEN RECALL WHAT IT WAS ABOUT, THAT'S THE TRAGIC PART. BUT MELANIE WAS LIVID. SHE MOVED TO SLAP ME. I STEPPED BACK TO DODGE IT--AND FELL... DOWN THE STEPS...THE LONG, CONCRETE LIGHTHOUSE STEPS...
GOSH...
I WAS PARALYZED INSTANTLY. THAT WAS THREE YEARS AGO. THE FAMILY HAS NEITHER SEEN NOR HEARD FROM MELANIE SINCE. NOT THAT IT'S A TERRIBLE LOSS, I SUPPOSE, WE NEVER GOT ALONG, EVEN AS KIDS. AND NOW THIS TERRIBLE THING WITH FATHER... YOU MUST HAVE READ THE PAPERS.
LEONARD HERSHWOOD'S DROWNING, YES. IT WAS AN ACCIDENT... OF COURSE...
IT WAS, MR. FATE, UNLESS (YAWN!) ...UNLESS YOU BELIEVE IN THE CURSE..
THE CURSE, SIR?
THE HERSHWOODS ARE DIRECT DESCENDANTS OF THE LEGENDARY "MACOCO CURSE" DATING BACK TO THE 1700'S. SUPPOSEDLY PETER HERSHWOOD ESCAPED THE ISLE OF THE SIRENS WITH MACOCO'S TREASURE AND BURIED IT SOMEWHERE HERE IN POINT LOMA.
LEGEND HAS IT THAT EACH GENERATION OF HERSHWOODS MUST SUFFER FOR OUR GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S TRANSGRESSION.
REALLY, SIR, YOU MUST GET SOME REST NOW.
YES, PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, GRETA... EXCUSE ME, MR. FATE, I'M NOT THE MAN I ONCE WAS..
WELL, ANY INTERESTING VIBRATIONS?
I CAN ONLY READ EVENTS, ARTIE, NOT MINDS, BUT THAT PLACE REEKS OF HATRED AND DESPAIR. WILFRED HERSHWOOD MUST REALLY HAVE IT IN FOR HIS SISTER AND VICE-VERSA. I SUSPECT SHE SUSPECTS HIM OF MURDERING THEIR FATHER, WHEELCHAIR OR NO. PROBABLY FOR THE HIDDEN BOOTY.
I TAKE IT YOU DON'T HOLD MUCH TRUCK WITH THE HERSHWOOD LEGEND?
HOMICIDAL MERMAIDS? COME ON, ARTIE, I'D HAVE TO SEE THAT TO BELIEVE IT!
WELL, KIDDO... YOU MIGHT JUST GET YOUR CHANCE..
14

LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE'S WAITING FOR YOU IN FRONT OF THE OFFICE.
HEY! THAT'S HER! THAT'S MELANIE HERSHWOOD!
MISS HERSHWOOD--
YOUR COMPANION, MISS SMITH, IS A GENUINE PSYCHIC, MR. FATE. WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE LITTLE FEUD BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR BROTHER WILFRED? WHY DIDN'T YOU MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT THE INFAMOUS HERSHWOOD CURSE? AND WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS SKULKING ABOUT IN THE SHADOWS, MISS HERSHWOOD?
THE FEUD BETWEEN MY BROTHER AND ME IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR-- IT HAS NO BEARING ON OUR FATHER'S MURDER.
MY BROTHER THERIN IS NOW IN CHARGE OF THE FAMILY LIGHTHOUSE... IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HE, TOO, IS DISPOSED OF! I BEG YOU TO HELP ME IN THIS AFFAIR, MR. FATE!
WHY NOT SIMPLY GO TO THE POLICE, GET THEM TO PATROL THE PLACE?
I TOLD YOU: I NEED A GENUINE PSYCHIC! SOMEONE WITH PRECOGNITIVE POWERS! YOU'RE WASTING MY TIME AGAIN, BOTH OF YOU!
HOLD ON A SECOND! DON'T GO RUNNING OFF AGAIN! WHERE CAN WE CONTACT YOU?
GONE! GREGARIOUS, ISN'T SHE?
STRANGE... SHE SEEMS SO COOL, SO ASSURED, AND YET... I SENSE GREAT SADNESS IN HER, ARTIE, GREAT REGRET..

...MR. HERSHWOOD...
...COME, COME TO ME, MR. HERSHWOOD...
...YES!... THIS WAY ...COME CLOSER...
....I'M HERE IN THE WATER, MR. HERSHWOOD!...
OVER HERE, THERIN.... OVER HERE!....
THAT'S IT!... COME!... EMBRACE ME!...

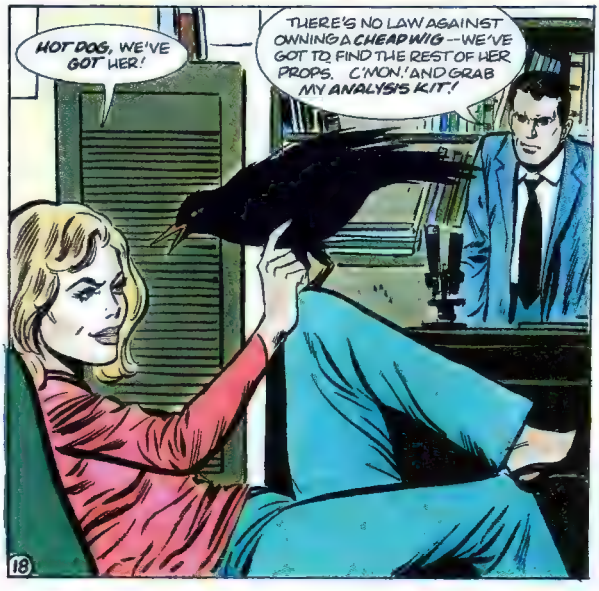
AGGGH!
SKRAAAAAWWL
TAKE CARE OF HERSHWOOD, ALEX, I'LL GET THE GIRL!
THIS WAY, MR. HERSHWOOD--
NO! MUST GO TO HER!...
WOK!
SORRY WE KEEP MEETING LIKE THIS!
DAMN! SHE WAS JUST HERE A MOMENT AGO...
HOLY MOSES, SHE REALLY IS A MERMAID!

ATTA BOY... PANT... YOU JUST REST EASY NOW..

GAVE YOU THE SLIP, HUH?
MAYBE NOT-- I WANT TO GET THIS HAIR BACK TO THE LAB BEFORE WE DO ANYTHING ELSE.

NOTICE ANYTHING INTERESTING ABOUT OUR MYSTERIOUS MERMAID?
YOU MEAN LIKE THE FACT SHE BEARS A REMARKABLE RESEMBLANCE TO THE BEAUTIFUL MISS MELANIE HERSHWOOD? I KNEW SHE WAS A MURDERESS! NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS PROVE IT!

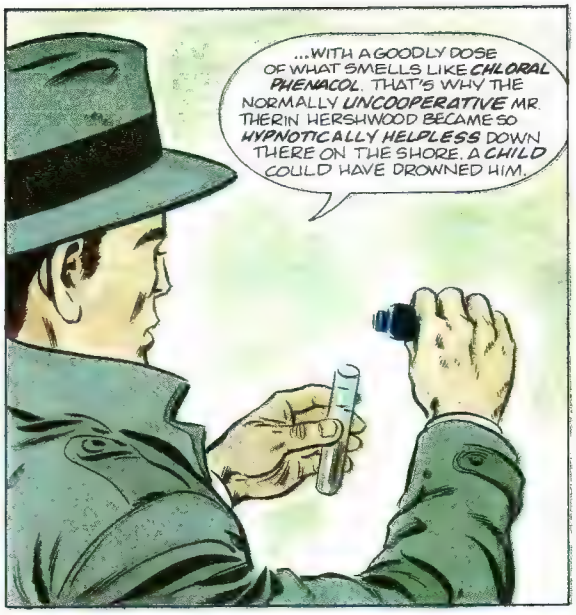
JUST AS I THOUGHT NYLON.


HOT DOG, WE'VE GOT HER!
THERE'S NO LAW AGAINST OWNING A CHEAP WIG -- WE'VE GOT TO FIND THE REST OF HER PROPS. C'MON! AND GRAB MY ANALYSIS KIT!

WHERE'RE WE OFF TO?
BACK TO THE LIGHTHOUSE FOR SOME SNOOPING! WE'LL DROP THERIN OFF ON WILFRED HERSHWOOD'S DOORSTEP ON THE WAY.

COLD, KIDDO?
NOT FROM THE WIND--IT'S THIS PLACE! THE-- THE ROCKS! SOMETHING AWFUL EMANATING FROM THEM!
LOOK, ARTIE, THE BOOK IS GONE! THE SHIP'S LOG!
IT ISN'T GONE... IT'S UPSTAIRS...
WHAT'S THAT?
WELL, ONE CORD IS THE LIGHTHOUSE PHONE LINE--
--AND UNLESS MY GUESS IS WRONG, I'D SAY THIS LITTLE CORD WRAPPED AROUND IT AND HIDDEN FROM VIEW IS A SPEAKER WIRE... ONE END OF WHICH IS ATTACHED TO A MICROPHONE SOMEWHERE BELOW--
--AND THE OTHER END OF WHICH LEADS TO THE SPEAKER HOUSED IN THAT AIR VENT OVER THE DESK. BE REAL HANDY FOR CALLING THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER DOWNSTAIRS IN A MYSTERIOUS, HAUNTING VOICE, WOULDN'T IT?
ONLY IF THE KEEPER WERE VERY GULLIBLE...
HE WOULD BE IF HE'D BEEN SITTING UP HERE ALL ALONE DURING A STORM, READING ABOUT THE MACOCO CURSE ALL NIGHT... THE HERSHWOODS ARE OBSESSED WITH IT.
THE LOG BOOK! YOU WERE RIGHT!

OF COURSE, IT DIDN'T *HURT* ANY THAT HE'D BEEN CHUGGING *THIS* STUFF ALL EVENING TO KEEP WARM...
SHE *SPIKED* THEIR COFFEE!


...WITH A GOODLY DOSE OF WHAT SMELLS LIKE *CHLORAL PHENACOL*. THAT'S WHY THE NORMALLY *UNCOOPERATIVE* MR. THERIN HERSHWOOD BECAME SO *HYPNOTICALLY HELPLESS* DOWN THERE ON THE SHORE. A *CHILD* COULD HAVE DROWNED HIM.

OR A *WOMAN*! SHE WAS MURDERING OFF HER *ENTIRE FAMILY* SO SHE COULD INHERIT THE MACOCO TREASURE WITHOUT HAVING TO *SPLIT* IT UP!
MAYBE. BUT THEN WHY DID SHE TRY TO HIRE *ME* TO HELP SOLVE THE MURDERS?

EASY! TO THROW THE *POLICE* AND EVERYBODY *ELSE* OFF! IF YOU SAW THE MERMAID, THEN *YOU*—BEING A LICENSED PROFESSIONAL—WOULD CONVINCE THE *OTHERS* THAT THE LEGEND WAS REALLY *TRUE!* AND YOU *DID* SEE IT, ARTIE, WE *BOTH* DID!
YEAH... AND IT LOOKED *JUST* LIKE *MELANIE HERSHWOOD*...

GEE, I *FORGOT* ABOUT THAT... IT DOESN'T *ADD UP*, THEN...
IS THAT *WATER* ON THE FLOOR OVER THERE?

WE MUST HAVE TRACKED IT IN.
WELL, *SOMEBODY* DID... HELLO, WHAT'S *THIS*?

THE LATEST IN LADIES *SWIMMING APPAREL*...
THE MERMAID'S *TAIL*! OH ARTIE, YOU'RE *HOT TONIGHT*!

NOW WHERE, MISTER GENIUS?
NOW, KIDDO, IT'S YOUR TURN TO BE PROFOUND--YOU'RE GOING TO FIND MA-COCO'S TREASURE!
YOU'RE CONVINCED IT'S BURIED NEAR THE LIGHTHOUSE SOMEWHERE?
I'M CONVINCED THERE'S SOMETHING UNDER THESE ROCKS THAT GIVES YOU THE WHIM-WHAMS EVERY TIME YOU PASS BY.
YOU'VE GOT TO OPEN UP, ALEX...
OH, ARTIE!... I DON'T LIKE THIS! IT'S SCARY!
SO'S THE MURDER OF AN INNOCENT MAN. YOU'VE GOT TO TRY, KID!
ALL RIGHT... I-I'LL TRY...
...I... I SEE... WOMAN... A WOMAN'S FACE... C-CAN'T MAKE IT OUT... M-MIGHT BE MELANIE'S..
...I... RED!... RED!... OH GOD, NO!... BLOOD!...
EASY...
"...BLOOD..."
"...BLOOD!... DEATH!..."
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...SHE'S... DON'T... PLEASE ... STOP IT!...
...NO!...
...THEY... COMING... YOU LET THEM IN! YOU LET THEM IN! GET AWAY FROM HER!...
...OHH GOD, GET AWAY!...
OH, NO! NOT THAT! GET AWAY FROM HER! GET AWAY!
OH GOD, HELP HER! SOMEBODY HELP HER! ARTIE! ARTIE!
ALEX, IT'S OKAY!
IT'S OKAY, BABY, I'VE GOT YOU NOW ... YOU FOUND IT!
OH, ARTIE! SOB; ARTIE!...
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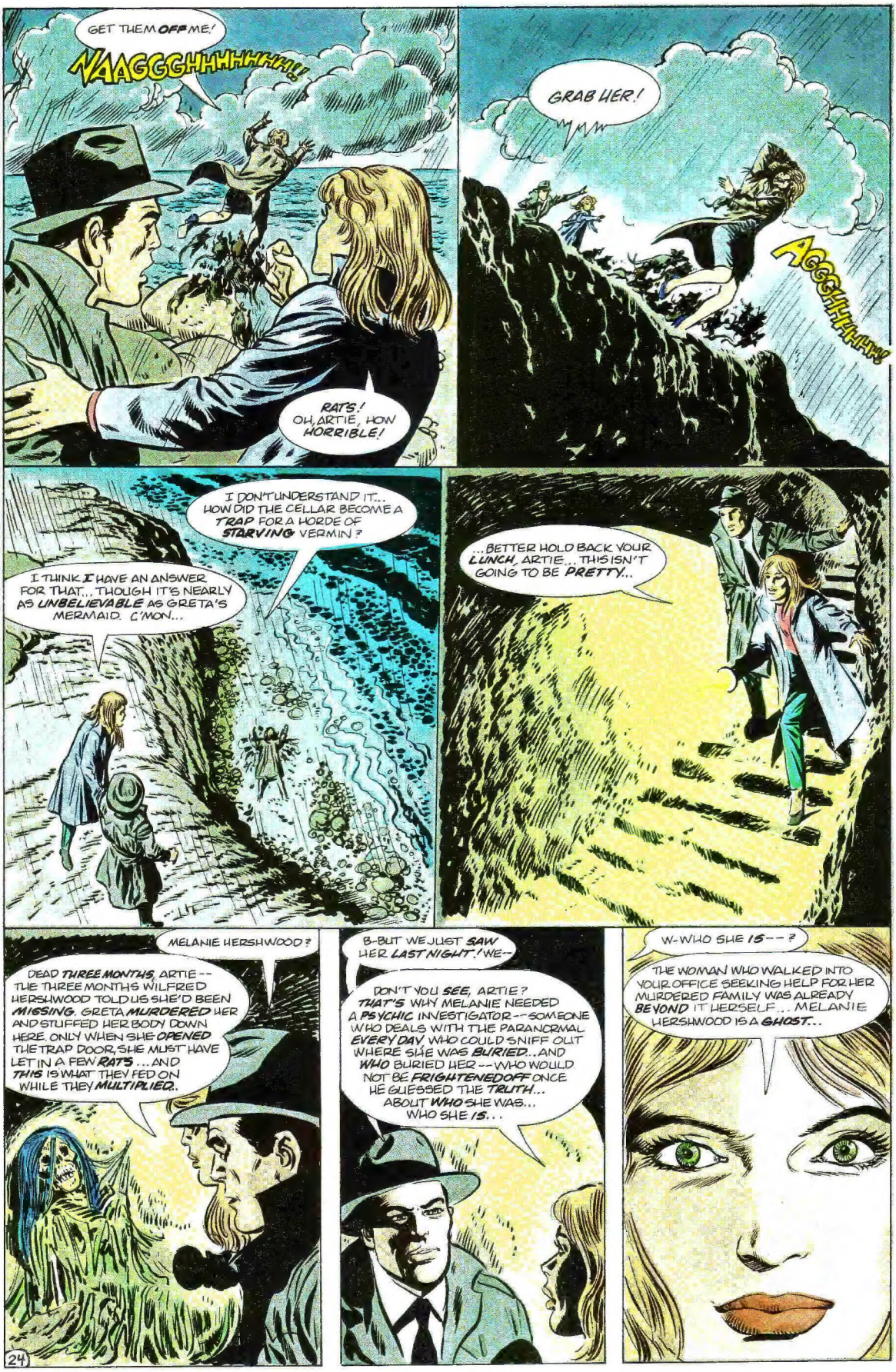
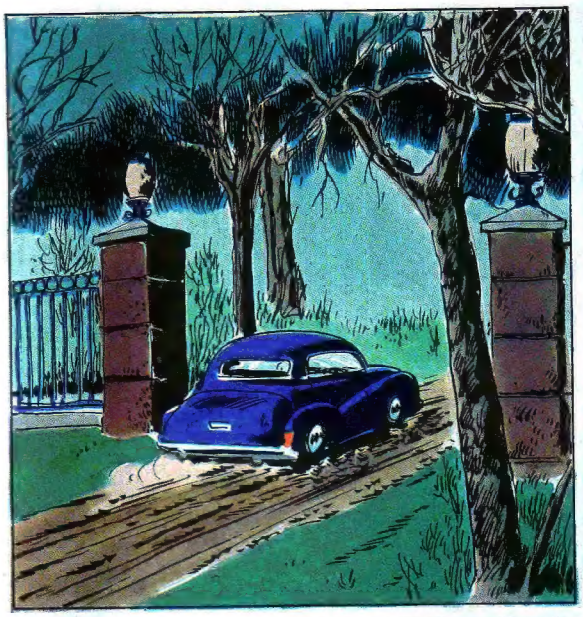
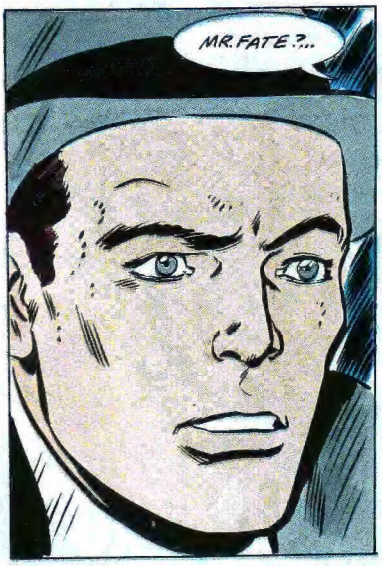
YES, YOU'VE FOUND IT, MR. FATE... THE PRECIOUS TREASURE OF MACOCO, HEH-HEH! YOU'RE VERY CLEVER AND RESOURCEFUL... AS IS YOUR LOVELY COMPANION...
GASP! ARTIE, IT'S--
GRETA... WILFRED HERSHWOOD'S NURSE. I WAS AFRAID OF THIS...
AFRAID? YOU, MR. FATE? INDEED, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE ABOUT WHO IS SEEMINGLY IMPERVIOUS TO FEAR AND SUGGESTION!
PERHAPS, BUT THEN, I NEVER SAMPLED YOUR DRUGGED COFFEE. IS THAT HOW YOU KEPT MR. WILFRED IN YOUR POWER ALL THESE YEARS WHILE YOU SET ABOUT KNOCKING OFF THE REST OF THE FAMILY?
IT WAS THE EASIEST WAY TO CONVINCE HIM THAT I SHOULD BE IN THE WILL. THE WILL, MR. FATE... THAT IS THE TRUE TREASURE OF THE HERSHWOODS. THE CHEST OF JEWELS WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A FRUSTRATED PULP WRITER'S DREAM. YOU DIDN'T DO YOUR HOMEWORK THERE.
OH, BUT I DID! I EVEN OWN A COPY OF ONE OF THE TWO NOVELS PETER HERSHWOOD MANAGED TO PUBLISH -- HE WASN'T VERY GOOD, BUT HE KNEW HIS PIRATE LEGENDS.
ENOUGH TO CONVINCE AN ENTIRE GENERATION HE'D ACTUALLY FOUND THE ISLE OF THE SIRENS. HANDS UP, PLEASE, MR. FATE!
AND THE HIDDEN CELLAR HERE?
ONLY A DESERTED BOMB SHELTER, I'M AFRAID. BUT A GOOD PLACE TO PUT THE NOSY MELANIE HERSHWOOD WHEN SHE GOT TOO CLOSE TO THE TRUTH! CAN I INVITE YOU TO JOIN HER NOW? ...I'M SURE SHE'D ADORE THE COMPANY!
NO, WAIT!!
EEEYAAGHHHHH!
SQUEEEK!
SQUEK-SQUEK
SQUEEEEEK!
23


GET THEM OFF ME!
NAAGGGHHHHHHHH!!!
RATS! OH, ARTIE, HOW HORRIBLE!
GRAB HER!
AGGGHHHHHH!!!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT... HOW DID THE CELLAR BECOME A TRAP FOR A HORDE OF STARVING VERMIN?
I THINK I HAVE AN ANSWER FOR THAT... THOUGH IT'S NEARLY AS UNBELIEVABLE AS GRETA'S MERMAID. C'MON...
..BETTER HOLD BACK YOUR LUNCH, ARTIE... THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE PRETTY...
MELANIE HERSHWOOD?
DEAD THREE MONTHS, ARTIE -- THE THREE MONTHS WILFRED HERSHWOOD TOLD US SHE'D BEEN MISSING. GRETA MURDERED HER AND STUFFED HER BODY DOWN HERE. ONLY WHEN SHE OPENED THE TRAP DOOR, SHE MUST HAVE LET IN A FEW RATS ... AND THIS IS WHAT THEY FED ON WHILE THEY MULTIPLIED.
B-BUT WE JUST SAW HER LAST NIGHT! WE--
DON'T YOU SEE, ARTIE? THAT'S WHY MELANIE NEEDED A PSYCHIC INVESTIGATOR -- SOMEONE WHO DEALS WITH THE PARANORMAL EVERY DAY, WHO COULD SNIFF OUT WHERE SHE WAS BURIED... AND WHO BURIED HER -- WHO WOULD NOT BE FRIGHTENED OFF ONCE HE GUESSED THE TRUTH... ABOUT WHO SHE WAS... WHO SHE IS...
W-WHO SHE IS--?
THE WOMAN WHO WALKED INTO YOUR OFFICE SEEKING HELP FOR HER MURDERED FAMILY WAS ALREADY BEYOND IT HERSELF... MELANIE HERSHWOOD IS A GHOST...



MELANIE
HERSHWOOD
1950-1987

GOODBYE, MELANIE HOPE I HELPED YOU OUT A LITTLE. AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE FEE... THIS ONE'S ON THE HOUSE.


MR. FATE?...

...COME TO ME, MR. FATE... COME CLOSER...

...CLOSER... EMBRACE ME...

HELL OF A WAY TO GET A DATE, KIDDO! WHERE'D YOU FIND THIS?

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOOKSHELF CLOSET, STUCK AWAY IN A CORNER. I GUESS WE WERE SO BUSY OGLING THE FISH TAIL WE OVERLOOKED IT. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE GRETA WANTED TO LOOK LIKE MELANIE, ANYWAY?
YOU HAD THAT ONE FIGURED BEFORE: IN CASE ANY UNWANTED PASSERBY SHOULD WITNESS HER LITTLE MASQUERADE. THAT WAY MELANIE WOULD TAKE THE BLAME, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT SHE WAS ON THE OUTS WITH THE REST OF THE HERSHWOOD FAMILY ALREADY.
WHY EXACTLY WAS SHE ON THE OUTS? EVER FIGURE THAT ONE OUT?
I HAVE A THEORY, THOUGH I DON'T CARE TO PURSUE IT: I DON'T THINK MELANIE TRIED TO SLAP HER BROTHER WILFRED AT THE TOP OF THE LIGHTHOUSE STAIRS THAT DAY THREE YEARS AGO...
...I THINK SHE PUSHED HIM.
PUSHED? MELANIE TRIED TO MURDER HIM?
TRIED TO PUSH HIM AWAY.. I THINK HER BROTHER MADE A PASS AT HER.
OH, ARTIE! AND GRETA USED IT TO ALIENATE MELANIE FROM THE OTHERS--THEN SET HER UP AS THE VINDICTIVE SISTER! HOW TERRIBLE FOR THEM! THE SAD STORY OF THE HERSHWOOD FAMILY. OLD PETER HERSHWOOD SHOULD HAVE PUT THAT INTO A NOVEL. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER THAN HIS PIRATE PLOTS!
ANYTHING GOOD PLAYING AT THE ROXY TONIGHT?
YOU KIDDIN'? JUST ROBERT MITCHUM IN "OUT OF THE PAST"!
YOU'RE ON, KIDDO...